

THE SEVENTH LETTER

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The Seventh Letter is ostensibly a reply to a request for advice and help from Dion's adherents sent immediately after Dion's murder. Actually, however, it is an apologia for Plato's own career, and in particular for his intervention in Sicilian affairs, an open letter intended, like the letters of St Paul, for wide circulation.¹ The apologetic motive is explicitly mentioned more than once,² and it assorts queerly with the circumstances in which the letter purports to be written. One would not expect an appeal for advice at a moment of crisis to be answered by so long and elaborate a letter, which must have taken a considerable time to compose, which contains much that is not directly relevant to the needs of the moment, and which is quite clearly addressed to the world at large. It has been suggested either that the appeal for help is a 'literary device, introduced as a picturesque setting for the letter that follows',³ or else that the apologia had been composed previously and was later fitted into the framework of a letter of advice.⁴ Whatever view one takes of these suggestions, there is no escaping the fact that the structure of the letter is extremely odd, and many of the transitions between its parts abrupt and awkward.

After an introductory paragraph the letter begins with an autobiographical section describing Plato's early life and his reasons for abstaining from politics. It constitutes a self-revelation without which we should be almost entirely ignorant of Plato's personal development, and it has generally been accepted as historical. It ends with the famous statement that by 388 B.C., at the time of his first visit to Sicily, Plato had come to the conclusion that the only cure for the troubles of mankind lay in the combination of political power and philosophy in the same person, a conclusion identical with the proclama-

1. At the end of the first paragraph the genesis of Plato's political views is said to be 'worth the attention of both young and old'.

2. cf. 330C, 337E, 339A, and the final sentence of the letter (352A).

3. Harward, *The Platonic Epistles*, 1932, p. 190.

4. Post, *Thirteen Epistles of Plato*, 1925, p. 56.

*tion of the need for philosopher-kings which is one of the central themes of the Republic.*¹

PLATO TO THE RELATIONS AND FRIENDS OF
DION, GREETINGS

324 In your letter you tell me that I am to regard you as sharing the convictions that Dion held, and you urge me to co-operate with you in speech and action to the best of my ability. If your beliefs and aims are in fact the same as his I am ready to cooperate with you; otherwise I must give the matter further consideration. As for the nature of Dion's convictions and aims, I am in a position to give an account of them which is based on clear knowledge, not on guesswork. When I first came to Syracuse (I was then about forty) Dion was the same age as Hipparinus now,² and he acquired at that time and never abandoned to the day of his death a conviction that Syracuse must be free under the best government possible. So it would not be surprising if some divine providence led Hipparinus too to hold the same political creed. How that creed came into existence is a tale worth the attention of both young and old, and, seeing that this is an appropriate moment, I will try to relate it from the beginning.

When I was a young man I expected, like many others, to

1. *Republic* 473D, 499D.

2. Opinion is divided over the identity of Hipparinus. Two persons of the name are known, one a son of Dion, the other a son of Dionysius I by Dion's sister Aristomache and therefore a half-brother of Dionysius II. The latter joined with Dion's followers to overthrow Callippus (cf. p. 108), and it seems likelier that it is he who is meant here. The objection to this identification is that Hipparinus should not be much more than twenty in 353, if he is to be the same age as Dion was in 388, and that since his mother was married to Dionysius I about 398 this is improbable. It is not, however, impossible, and Plutarch (*Dion* 3) expressly says that Aristomache was childless for a long time after her marriage. If, on the other hand, Hipparinus is Dion's son, we are faced with the difficulty that, according to Plutarch (*Dion* 55), he died before his father. The difficulties about Hipparinus have been used as an argument against the authenticity of both the Seventh and Eighth Letters (see also pp. 151 f.).

embark, as soon as I was my own master, on a political career. The condition in which I found public affairs was this. People were dissatisfied with the existing constitution, and a revolution took place, as a result of which power was concentrated in the hands of fifty-one men.¹ Eleven were in charge in the city and ten in Piræus – each of these bodies had the supervision of the market and municipal affairs generally – while the remaining thirty assumed supreme control of the whole state. Some of them were relations and acquaintances of mine and invited me at once to join them in what seemed an obvious career for me. Naturally enough, in view of my youth, I expected that this government would bring about a change from corrupt to upright administration, and I watched with the keenest interest to see what they would do. I found that it had taken these men no time at all to make the previous government look like an age of gold; among other things they sent for Socrates, an older friend of mine, whom I would not hesitate to call the best man then living, and sent him with a number of others to arrest one of the citizens and bring him to execution. Their purpose in this was to involve Socrates in their actions, whether he liked it or not, but Socrates, so far from obeying, was prepared to risk everything rather than participate in their infamous deeds.² So when I saw all this and several other momentous events of the same sort I was disgusted and withdrew myself from the prevailing wickedness. Shortly afterwards a total revolution put an end to the rule of the Thirty, and once again, though more gradually, I began to feel a desire to take part in public life. Things were still unsettled, and even under the new government many things took place which one could not but condemn; it was not surprising that in a time of unrest some men seized the opportunity of taking an excessive revenge upon their enemies. Nevertheless the restored exiles behaved with great

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1. Plato was born about 427 B.C. and the revolution which placed the Thirty in power took place in the summer of 404.

2. Socrates was sent with four others to arrest a certain Leon of Salamis, but ignored the order. cf. *Apology* 32C.

moderation. But it so happened that some men in power brought my associate Socrates before the courts on a wicked charge, to which Socrates least of all men should have been liable; they accused him of impiety, and the court condemned and put to death the man who, when the party now prevailing was outlawed and in exile, had refused to participate in the wrongful arrest of one of its own adherents.

So when I saw this and the kind of men who were active in politics and the principles on which things were managed, I concluded that it was difficult to take part in public life and retain one's integrity, and this feeling became stronger the more I observed and the older I became. Nothing could be done without friends and loyal associates. Such men were not easy to find among one's existing acquaintance, for affairs were no longer conducted on the principles practised by our ancestors, and new friends could not be acquired with any facility. Besides, the corruption of written law and established custom was proceeding at an astonishing rate, so that I, who began by being full of enthusiasm for a political career, ended by growing dizzy at the spectacle of universal confusion. I did not cease to consider how an improvement might be effected in this particular situation and in politics in general, and I remained on the watch for the right moment for action, but finally I came to the conclusion that the condition of all existing states is bad – nothing can cure their constitutions but a miraculous reform assisted by good luck – and I was driven to assert, in praise of true philosophy, that nothing else can enable one to see what is right for states and for individuals, and that the troubles of mankind will never cease until either true and genuine philosophers attain political power or the rulers of states by some dispensation of providence become genuine philosophers.

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PLATO'S FIRST VISIT TO SICILY. HIS FRIENDSHIP WITH DION LEADS TO THE INVITATION TO VISIT DIONYSIUS II ON HIS ACCESSION TO POWER

IN 367

What was the nature of the conversion which Dion with Plato's help hoped to effect in Dionysius? This is never clearly stated. At first sight, in view of the expectation attributed to Dion that now if ever there was chance of uniting the philosopher and the ruler in the same person, it is natural to suppose that they hoped to mould Dionysius into a philosopher-king of the type described in the Republic. It seems likely, however, that the aim of Plato at any rate was much more modest. He states plainly that his advice to Dion's adherents is the same as that which was adopted by Dion and which he gave to Dionysius, and the three elements in this programme are the substitution for absolutism of constitutional government under the rule of law, the reformation of morals, and the resettlement of the devastated Greek cities and the protection of Greek Sicily from the Carthaginians. The emphasis on the importance of the rule of law, which shall be binding upon sovereigns and subjects alike, is fully in harmony with the view expressed by Plato in the late dialogue called the Statesman (Politicus) that a perfectly wise ruler who can dispense with constitutional restraints is an almost impossible ideal, and that a code of law is therefore indispensable. Similarly, the 'mixed' constitution recommended in the Eighth Letter finds its counterpart in the complex arrangements for a combination of oligarchy and democracy detailed in Plato's longest and latest work, the Laws. Nor is there good reason to think that, even at the time when he wrote the Republic, Plato believed in his philosopher-kings as a practical possibility. He may well have hoped that a change in Dionysius' outlook and way of life could result in constitutional reform,¹ but there is no need to attribute

1. At *Laws* 709ff it is stated that a dictatorship provides the best basis for a change to good government, because of the reforms which a virtuous dictator has it in his power to make. It has been suggested that this was written with Dionysius in mind. On this whole subject cf. Morrow, G. R., *Plato's Epistles*, pp. 155ff.

to him the extreme political naïveté of expecting to found an ideal commonwealth in the conditions prevailing at Syracuse.

This was the state of mind in which I paid my first visit to Italy¹ and Sicily. When I arrived I found nothing whatever to please me in the tastes of a society devoted to Italian and Syracusan cookery,² where happiness was held to consist in filling oneself full twice a day, never sleeping alone at night, and indulging in the other pursuits that go with such a way of living. Brought up from boyhood in such an environment no man under heaven could become wise – he would need to be endowed with a temperament altogether miraculous – nor would he be any more likely to acquire self-control and the other qualities which go to make up goodness. Similarly no state, whatever its constitution, can enjoy peace and quietness if the citizens believe luxury to be the only proper object of expenditure and hold that men should be free from all other business to devote themselves entirely to feasting and drinking and the pursuit of love. Such a state must inevitably be involved in a never-ending round of revolution – it will be by turns a despotism, an oligarchy and a democracy – and those who hold power in it will not endure to hear a just and fair constitution so much as mentioned. With these thoughts in my head in addition to those which I have already spoken of, I made my way to Syracuse. Perhaps it was chance, but it looks as if some higher power was contriving at that time to lay the foundation of the events which have recently befallen Dion and Syracuse, and it may be of further events as well, unless you listen to the advice which I am now giving for the second time.³ What do I mean by saying that my arrival in Sicily at that moment was the foundation of everything? Meeting

1. In Italy Plato first made the acquaintance of Archytas of Tarentum, the Pythagorean philosopher and statesman, who played a significant part in Plato's subsequent experiences in Sicily.

2. For Sicilian luxury cf. *Republic* 404C, *Gorgias* 518B.

3. The first time was presumably Plato's attempt to influence Dionysius II. Later (334D) he speaks of giving the same advice on three occasions, first to Dion, next to Dionysius, third, in this letter, to Dion's adherents.

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Dion, who was then a young man, I disclosed to him in conversation the course which in my view is best for humanity and urged him to put it into practical effect; it looks as if by doing so I was in a sense unconsciously contriving the overthrow of despotism which was to take place. Dion at any rate, who was as quick to grasp my teaching as he was to grasp everything else, became a more enthusiastic convert to my views than any young man I have ever met, and resolved to spend the rest of his life very differently from the mass of Italians and Sicilians, adopting goodness as his ideal in preference to pleasure and luxury. So from that time to the death of the elder Dionysius he was something of a thorn in the flesh of those who were in the service of despotic government. When that event occurred he conceived the idea that he might not be alone in holding the views which true reasoning had led him to adopt; he observed them growing in the minds of others, not many, I admit, but some, and he believed that with the help of heaven the younger Dionysius might be one of them; his conversion, if it could be effected, would be an unspeakable blessing to the Syracusans in general as well as to Dionysius himself. Remembering how easily my association with him had converted him to a desire for the best and noblest way of life, he decided that I must at all costs return to Syracuse at once to take part in what was happening. If he were to succeed in his attempt to influence Dionysius he had high hopes that he could establish genuine happiness throughout the country without slaughter and bloodshed and the evils that have in fact occurred. Entertaining these ideas, as he was quite right to do, he persuaded Dionysius to send for me, and he added his own entreaties that I should come at once without fail, before others under whose influence Dionysius might fall should turn him from this ideal into less worthy courses. At the risk of being tedious I will transcribe his actual words. 'When', he asked, 'shall we get anything better than this heaven-sent opportunity?' Then he went on to tell at length of the empire established in Italy and Sicily, and of his own position in it, and of the youth and eagerness of Dionysius,

laying special emphasis on his aptitude for philosophy and education. He added that his own nephews and relations could easily be won over to the life and doctrine preached by me, and would be excellently placed to assist in converting Dionysius. So now, if ever, there was a possibility of realizing the hope of combining the philosopher and the ruler of a great state in the same person.

These, with many others of the same kind, were the arguments urged upon me by Dion. In coming to a decision I felt some fear how things would turn out with the younger men – young men are apt to fall a prey to sudden and often inconsistent impulses – but I knew that Dion was by nature serious-minded, and by this time he was already middle-aged. So, though I hesitated and debated whether I should accept the invitation and go, or how I should act, in the end what weighed with me was the consideration that, if ever an attempt was to be made to put into practice my convictions about law and government, now was the time; if I could persuade but one man fully to adopt my views I should have attained my whole object. Encouraged by these thoughts I set out from home. My motives were not what some supposed; what chiefly influenced me was fear of losing my self-respect and turning out in my own eyes a creature of mere words reluctant to embark upon any action, a traitor in the first place to the friendship and hospitality of Dion, who was actually in a position of no little danger. Suppose some disaster were to befall him, or suppose he were to be driven into exile by Dionysius and his other enemies and were to come to me as a fugitive and say: ‘Plato, you see me here in exile, not for lack of infantry and cavalry to repel my enemies, but for want of convincing arguments, which I knew that you above all men were able to employ to convert young men to goodness and righteousness, and to establish love and friendship between them whatever the circumstances. It is because you have done nothing to supply my want of such arguments that I have left Syracuse and am here. And *my* plight is the lesser part of the disgrace that you have incurred; can you deny that on this

occasion you have by betraying me betrayed philosophy itself, which you are always praising and which you assert that the rest of the world treats with dishonour? If I were an inhabitant of Megara,¹ you could not refuse to come in answer to my appeals for help without entirely forfeiting your self-respect. Do you suppose for a moment that, as things are, you can escape the reputation of cowardice by excusing yourself on the score of the length of the journey and the hardships involved in so great a voyage? Quite the contrary.' What plausible answer could I make to such an indictment? None. So I decided to obey the claims of reason and justice as far as is humanly possible, and went; these were the motives which led me to abandon my normal pursuits, which are far from discreditable, and live under a despotism which seemed inconsistent with my convictions and my character. By so doing I discharged the claims of hospitality and preserved myself from any reproach from philosophy, which would have suffered shame if I had played the coward and incurred disgrace by shirking my duty.

When I arrived – to cut short a long story – I found the court of Dionysius seething with intrigue, and Dion the object of much misrepresentation to the authorities. I defended him to the best of my ability, but that ability was small, and about four months after my arrival Dionysius accused Dion of plotting against the government, put him aboard a small ship, and sent him into exile. After that all of us who were friends of Dion feared that Dionysius would fasten on one of us an accusation of being Dion's accomplice; there was even a rumour in Syracuse about me that I had been put to death by Dionysius for being the prime cause of the whole business. But Dionysius, seeing our state of mind and fearing that our apprehensions might give rise to something worse, tried to win us all over by cordiality; me in particular he set himself to console and encourage, and begged me by all means to stay; his credit was involved in my staying rather than

1. The point is that Megara, a town on the isthmus of Corinth, was only a short distance from Athens.

running away from him, and for this reason he pretended to be very much in earnest in his requests, though we know of course that the requests of despots have an element of compulsion about them. In pursuit of his end and to prevent my departure he brought and lodged me inside the citadel, from which no ship's captain would have dared to remove me without an express order to this effect sent by Dionysius himself, still less in defiance of Dionysius' prohibition. Nor would any merchant or any officer in command at the frontier have allowed me to leave the country on my own; he would have arrested me and taken me straight back to Dionysius, especially as it was now being rumoured, contrary to the earlier report, that Dionysius was wonderfully fond of Plato. What was the real situation? The truth of the matter is that as time went on and he became more familiar with my character and way of life Dionysius did in fact become fonder of me; but he wanted to supplant Dion in my esteem and to take his place as my particular friend, and he showed wonderful eagerness in his efforts to achieve this. He shrank, however, from the best method of gaining his end, if it could be gained at all, which was to make himself my pupil and take part with me in philosophical discussion; our ill-wishers had made him fear that if he did that he would find himself in a trap, and that Dion would thus have accomplished his whole aim. I put up with all this, adhering to the original purpose of my visit, in the hope that he might somehow come to desire the life of philosophy, but his resistance was too much for me.

ADVICE TO THE ADHERENTS OF DION

Plato now turns to what he professes to regard as the main purpose of his letter, advice to Dion's party. The main points in this have been mentioned in the preface to the previous section; they are introduced here in a somewhat discursive manner and with a good deal of repetitiveness, and they are said to constitute the same policy as Dion and Plato urged upon Dionysius and as Dion would himself have attempted to put into effect had he lived. Great stress is laid on the importance of

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self-discipline in those in power, and on the necessity of establishing a code of law. For the latter Plato's correspondents are urged to seek the help of wise men from other parts of the Greek world, and to entrust them with the task of legislating for Syracuse. There is nothing foreign to Greek sentiment in such a suggestion. Plutarch (Dion 53) says that before his death Dion had sent for advisers from Corinth, the mother city of Syracuse, and we hear of many prominent members of the Academy being sent on legislative missions. The number, however, of the advisers suggested seems unrealistic (cf. p. 130, n. 1).

It is to be noticed that the advice which this section contains is interwoven with other material, much of it apologetic in purpose. This is particularly true of the paragraph in which Plato exonerates Athens from any blame for the treachery of the Athenian Callippus. Here he is explicitly answering a definite charge. But a similar purpose is to be seen also in the emphasis with which Plato deprecates interference in politics unasked or where nothing can be achieved without the use of force. It is surely natural to see here a justification for his own abstention from Athenian politics.

These are the reasons which account for my first visit to Sicily and the time that I spent there. Later on I left home again and returned once more to Sicily at the urgent behest of Dionysius. But before I give my reasons for doing so and attempt to explain and justify what I did for the benefit of those who are always asking me what was my motive in going a second time, I will first advise you on your best course in the present circumstances; otherwise I shall be treating as my main theme what is really a side issue. What I have to say is this.

When a man is sick and following a course injurious to his health, surely the first task of anyone whom he consults must be to change his way of life, and make sure of his willingness to obey instructions before going on to give more detailed advice. If he is not willing, a genuine physician who is a man of spirit will, in my opinion, avoid further consultation; to continue to advise in these circumstances indicates a lack both of spirit and of skill. The same is true of a state, whether its

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government is in the hands of one man or of many; when its government is on the right lines a sensible man will give advice if he is consulted on any matter touching its interests. But if those who consult him have completely abandoned the true principles of government and firmly refuse to return to the right track, and tell their adviser to let the constitution alone on pain of death and to confine himself to advising on the quickest and easiest way for them to obtain the permanent satisfaction of their wishes and desires, I should call the person who gave advice on these terms a coward and the person who refused it a brave man. This is my conviction, and, whenever someone consults me on a matter of importance in his own life, his property, for example, or his physical or spiritual well-being, I first consider whether his daily life is directed by any principle and whether he is willing to listen to my advice on the subject communicated to me. If he is I am delighted to advise him, and there is nothing perfunctory about my treatment of his problem. But if I am not consulted at all, or if it is perfectly clear that my advice will not be taken, I do not come forward with it unasked; as for compulsion, I would not exercise it even on my own son. I might offer advice to a slave, or even compel him if he were recalcitrant, but to put compulsion on one's father or mother I do not think right, unless they should be suffering from some mental derangement.¹ If they have a settled way of life which pleases them, though it may not please me, it is not for me either to make enemies of them by useless admonitions or to pander to them by helping them to obtain the satisfaction of desires which I myself would rather die than entertain. The same principle will be followed by a wise man in his behaviour towards his own state; if he thinks anything amiss with its government he will speak out, provided that his words are not going to be wasted or to bring him to his death, but he will not attempt to change the constitution of his native land by force. When reformation cannot be achieved without the infliction of exile and death on

1. cf. *Crito* 51C. 'It is not right to put compulsion on one's father or mother, and still less on one's country.'

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some people, he will simply keep quiet and pray for the welfare of himself and his country.¹

Acting on this principle I would give the same advice to you as I joined with Dion in giving to Dionysius. This was in the first place to conduct his daily life on such a plan as to give him the highest possible degree of mastery over himself and to win him loyal friends and associates. In this way he would avoid the fate of his father, who, when he came into possession of many cities which had been completely sacked by the barbarians, was unable to resettle them by establishing in each a loyal government managed by friends; he could not find such people either among foreigners or among his younger brothers, though he had brought up the latter himself, and raised them from a private station to positions of power and from poverty to exceptional wealth. Neither persuasion nor teaching, neither favours nor ties of blood, enabled him to make any of them the partners of his rule; he was seven times worse off than Darius,² who, though he had no brothers or men brought up by himself to depend on, but only those who had helped him to overthrow the Mede and the Eunuch, divided his realm among them in seven parts, each larger than the whole of Sicily, and found that he could rely on the loyalty of partners who attacked neither him nor one another. Darius set an example of what a good law-giver and king should be; he established laws which have preserved the Persian empire to the present day. The same may be said of the Athenians, who took over a number of Greek cities which

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1. cf. *Republic* 496, where the philosopher is advised to keep quiet like a man sheltering from a storm under a wall.

2. Darius became king of Persia by destroying a Median usurper called Smerdis with the aid of *six* confederates. For the whole story cf. Herodotus 3. 61ff. According to Herodotus Darius divided his realm into twenty satrapies. An inscription at Persepolis gives the number as twenty-four. These discrepancies have been used as an argument against the authenticity of the letter. But Plato follows the same version in *Laws* 695c, where the number of provinces is again given as *seven* and the pretender called the Eunuch.

had been invaded by the barbarians¹ but were still inhabited. Though they had not founded them themselves they preserved their empire over them for seventy years by having in each of them men in power who were their friends. But Dionysius, though he united the whole of Sicily into one state, because he was too shrewd to trust anyone hardly managed to survive. He was poor in loyal and true friends, and a man's possession or lack of these is the surest indication of a good or bad disposition.

This is the advice that Dion and I gave to Dionysius, seeing that his father's neglect had left him devoid of education and of suitable society. We urged him first of all to reform his own life,² next, when he had started on this course, to find among his kinsmen and contemporaries friends who would be of like mind with himself in the pursuit of goodness, and above all to be consistent in his own conduct, for in this respect he had grown up remarkably deficient. We did not use such plain language as this – it was not safe to do so – but we succeeded by veiled allusions in maintaining the thesis that every man who would preserve himself and the people he rules must follow this course, and that any other will lead to utter destruction. If he would take the way which we pointed out to him and make himself into an intelligent and disciplined person he might resettle the deserted cities of Sicily and bind them together by such political institutions as would dispose them to come to his aid and one another's against attacks by the barbarians;³ in this way he would have an empire not merely double his father's but in reality many times as great. For if all this came to pass he would be in a position to impose upon the Carthaginians a yoke far heavier than they endured in the time of Gelon⁴ instead of continuing to pay tribute to them under the agreement made by his father.

1. i.e. the Persians. The Athenian empire lasted for approximately seventy years ending in 404 B.C.

2. I follow Burnet in assuming a lacuna after *πρῶτον*.

3. In this case the Carthaginians.

4. Gelon, tyrant of Syracuse, defeated the Syracusans at Himera in 480 B.C. and exacted an indemnity from them.

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These were the exhortations addressed to Dionysius by us, who, according to the reports current in many quarters, were plotting against him. These reports obtained such credit with Dionysius that they brought about the banishment of Dion, and threw us into a state of fear. To come at once to the end of the many events which happened in a brief space, Dion returned from the Peloponnese and Athens and taught Dionysius a lesson which was far from theoretical. But, when he had twice¹ freed their city and restored it to them, the Syracusans exhibited the same feelings towards Dion as had Dionysius. Dion's attempt to make himself a partner in the whole of Dionysius' life was made in the belief that he could educate him and mould him into a monarch worthy of his throne, but Dionysius preferred to side with Dion's enemies, who declared that everything that Dion did at that period was part of a plot against the despotic government, and that his aim in educating Dionysius was to bewitch him into neglecting his royal office and entrusting it to Dion, who would then make it his own and treacherously deprive Dionysius of his throne. These were the slanders which won the day then, and afterwards a second time, when they were circulated in Syracuse; and very monstrous this victory was and shameful to those who were the authors of it. Its exact nature must be made plain to those who are asking me to intervene in the present situation.

I, an Athenian citizen and an associate of Dion, went to the court of the despot to help in establishing friendship between Dionysius and Dion instead of hostility, but in my struggle with those who were making trouble I was worsted. Dionysius tried by honours and gifts to win me over to his side, and to persuade me to testify that he was justified in banishing Dion, but he entirely failed. At a later period Dion returned home, bringing in his train two brothers from Athens,²

1. First, when he took the city from Dionysius II on his arrival from Greece, second, when he was recalled from Leontini to protect it against Nyspius, Dionysius' lieutenant.

2. Callippus and Philostratus. cf. Plutarch, *Dion* 54.

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whose friendship he had acquired not through philosophy but by the sort of chance acquaintance which forms the basis of most friendships, and which is exercised in mutual hospitality and participation in the rites and ceremonies of the mysteries; it was in this way and because of the services they rendered in connection with his return that these two became Dion's associates. When they arrived in Sicily and found that false reports of Dion's ambition to make himself dictator were being spread among the very Sicilians whom he had liberated, they not only betrayed the friend whose hospitality they had enjoyed but may almost be said to have murdered him with their own hands, inasmuch as they stood by fully armed to help his assassins. The foulness and wickedness of this act calls for no comment from me – many others both now and hereafter will make it their business to sing in that strain. There is however one point that I cannot pass over. It is commonly said that the name of Athens is dishonoured by the conduct of these men. But I could point out that the man who refused to betray this same Dion, when by doing so he might have acquired great wealth and honour, is also an Athenian. His friendship with Dion was based not on vulgar good-fellowship but on association in liberal studies, and this, rather than spiritual¹ or physical kinship, is the only sure foundation of friendship for a man of sense. So I maintain that the reputation of Athens cannot fairly be held to have been stained by Dion's murderers: to think otherwise is to ascribe to them an importance which they never possessed.

All that I have been saying is for the benefit of Dion's relations and friends, but to it I have to add the same advice and the same teaching as I have already given twice before to two other hearers. The substance of that teaching is that Sicily, like other states, should be subject not to the tyranny of men but to the rule of law. Absolute power is bad both for those who exercise it and for those who are subject to it, for themselves and their children's children and their remoter

1. Presumably referring to the bond formed by initiation into the mysteries.

descendants; the experience of it is utter destruction, and the prizes which it confers are snatched at only by small and mean souls, who know nothing of what is good and right both here and hereafter, both in earth and heaven. This is the truth which I preached first to Dion, then to Dionysius, and now for the third time I am preaching to you. Listen to me then for the sake of Zeus the Saviour, to whom the third libation belongs,¹ and consider also the destinies of Dionysius and Dion. Dionysius rejected my teaching and though he is still alive lives in dishonour: Dion embraced it and died a glorious death; for to meet whatever fate sends in the attempt to reach the highest for oneself and one's country is altogether right and glorious. None of us is exempt from death, nor if he were would he be happy, as men commonly suppose; good and evil are meaningless to things that have no soul; it is only a soul either in the body or separated from it which can experience either. Now we must always hold fast to the sacred truth declared of old that the soul is immortal, and when it is separated from the body must submit to judgement and be severely punished; that is why we must believe it a lesser evil to suffer even great wrongs and injuries than to inflict them. But this is something to which the man whose greed for wealth matches the poverty of his soul pays no heed, or if he does he supposes that he can afford to mock at it, while he snatches shamelessly, like an animal, at whatever he thinks will enable him to satisfy his appetite for food or drink or for that coarse and shameless pleasure which wrongly takes its name from Aphrodite. He is blind and does not see the consequences entailed by his abominable acts of rapacity, and how each wicked deed increases the burden of evil which the wrongdoer must drag about with him, not only while he wanders upon the earth but when he has taken his utterly shameful and miserable journey back to the world below.

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These and such as these were the convictions which I tried to impress upon Dion, and I have as good cause to be angry

1. A reference to the custom at banquets where the third and last libation was poured to Zeus the Saviour.

with his murderers as with Dionysius. Both parties have inflicted upon me and, I may say, upon the world at large a wrong of the gravest kind, the first by destroying the man who wished to put justice into effect, the second by refusing to put justice into effect throughout his realm though he had the power to do so. If he had really united philosophy and political power in the same person he might have given a light to the whole world, Greek and barbarian alike, and brought home to everybody the truth that neither a state nor an individual can be happy whose life is not lived wisely under the guidance of justice, an ideal which requires either that a man should possess these virtues in himself or else that he should have been bred and trained in the ways of righteousness under the rule of men of holiness. This is the wrong perpetrated by Dionysius, and the other injuries that I suffered from him are trivial in comparison. But the murderer of Dion has unwittingly produced the same effect. I know for certain, in so far as one human being can speak with certainty of another, that if Dion had become master of the state the form which his rule would have taken would have been this. First of all, once he had freed his native Syracuse from the yoke of slavery and washed away her stains and dressed her in the garb of liberty, he would have spared no pains to equip her citizens with a fitting system of law based on the best principles. Next, he would have set eagerly about the business of resettling the whole of Sicily and freeing it from the barbarians, expelling some of them and subjugating the rest, a task in which he would have met with fewer obstacles than Hiero.¹ Now, if this had been effected by a man who, besides being brave and upright and disciplined, was a philosopher, the masses would have acquired the same respect for goodness as would have arisen among mankind at large and proved its salvation, if I had succeeded in convincing Dionysius. But as things have turned out some evil spirit has attacked us, bringing with it contempt for law and religion and, worst of all, the reckless-

1. The brother of Gelon and his successor at Syracuse.

ness of ignorance – a soil in which all evil things take root and grow and produce in the end a crop most bitter to those who sowed it. It has overturned and ruined all our plans for the second time. Let us not however say anything which might bring bad luck upon a third attempt.

In spite of all that has happened, I advise you who were Dion's friends to imitate his love for his country and the simplicity of his style of living, and to try to realize his aims under better auspices. What those aims were I have already explained quite clearly. But if any of you is unable to live in the old Doric way like your fathers, and hankers after the Sicilian fashions followed by the murderers of Dion, do not enlist his aid or suppose him capable of acting reliably and in good faith. Otherwise, for the task of resettling the whole of Sicily so that all shall enjoy equal rights, call to your help men from all over the Peloponnese as well as from Sicily itself, and do not fear to approach even Athens; there too you will find men of pre-eminent excellence who hate the hardened audacity of such as kill their host. But if this must be deferred to a later stage, because you are hard pressed by the internal strife which springs up daily among you in many different forms, then anyone to whom providence has granted even a modicum of right belief must realize that the horrors of civil war will never come to an end until those who have gained the upper hand cease to seek for the satisfaction of old grudges by pitched battles or by banishing and slaughtering their opponents, and abandon the idea of punishing their enemies. Instead of this they must restrain themselves and, having established for the common good a system of law as much to the advantage of the vanquished as of themselves, compel their former foes to be law-abiding by the operation of the twin motives of shame and fear – fear, because the winners have shown that they have a superiority of force, and shame, because they are clearly better at controlling their desires, and more able as well as more willing to subject themselves to the law. This is the only way in which a state torn by civil war can bring its troubles to an end; otherwise such states are liable to be for ever

divided against themselves by strife and enmity, hatred and distrust.

The victors then at any particular moment, if they wish to achieve security, must choose out after mutual consultation the best men that they can find among the Greeks, men of advanced age in the first place who have wives and children at home, and who can trace their descent from a long and honourable line of distinguished ancestors and each possess an adequate amount of property. For a city with a population of ten thousand fifty such will be a sufficient number.¹ These men must be induced by earnest entreaties and by the offer of the highest honours to leave their homes, and on their arrival requested and required to frame a code of law, first binding themselves by an oath to show no favour either to winners or to losers but to act impartially in the interest of the city as a whole. Once the law has been framed everything will depend on the winning side showing itself more ready to obey the law than the losers; if it does so all will be well; security and prosperity will prevail, and the state will be delivered from all its troubles. But in the opposite event do not call on me or anyone else for help in dealing with those who will not abide by the principles I have laid down. This course is akin to that which Dion and I tried jointly to put into effect for the good of Syracuse. It is however only second best. The best is that which we hoped to carry through with the cooperation of Dionysius himself,² but fate which is stronger than men brought our plans to naught. So now it is for you to try to bring things to a happier outcome, and may heaven send you good fortune and success in the attempt.

1. It has been suggested that this sentence is a later insertion. The number seems much too large, and there seems no point in its being proportional to the population. In the Eighth Letter (356c) the number of such a committee is left to be settled by agreement, and in *Laws* (704c) a similar committee has only ten members.

2. Omitting the words *πάντων κοινὰ ἀγαθὰ*, 'goods common to all', as a gloss, inserted by a scribe who supposed that the best course was the communism advocated for philosopher-kings in the Republic. There is no suggestion elsewhere that such a course was ever urged upon Dionysius. cf. Morrow, *Plato's Epistles*, pp. 160ff.

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PLATO'S SECOND VISIT TO DIONYSIUS II

Plato is at pains to emphasize the reluctance with which he embarked on his last visit to Syracuse. Ultimately he decided to go, partly to do what he could to protect Dion's interests, partly because Archytas and other Pythagorean friends represented to him that Dionysius' interest in philosophy was far from extinct. A further motive which is implied rather than explicitly stated was probably to protect his own philosophical reputation. The news that Dionysius was engaged in philosophical discussion must have raised doubts in the mind of Plato, who knew how slight was Dionysius' acquaintance with Platonic thought. After the visit, which confirmed Plato's fears, Dionysius appears to have written a book on Plato's philosophy which Plato repudiates in the strongest terms. It leads him to declare that no written exposition of his fundamental thought is possible or desirable, and that he himself has never written and will never write a treatise about it. The only way in which it can be learned is by long association between teacher and pupil, and the depreciation of writing repeats in stronger terms the view of the matter put forward in the Phaedrus 275ff (pp. 97ff above).

In view of Plato's own extensive writings the denial that he has written or will write is strange. It has to be remembered, however, that his own writings are dialogues, not systematic treatises, and that none of them contains a formal exposition of the Theory of Forms. In the Republic (506ff) Socrates declares that the supreme idea of good can be conveyed only by an analogy, that of the sun, and both there and elsewhere Plato speaks of the ultimate apprehension of the good as something in the nature of a mystical experience, which is incommunicable. Very much the same language is used in this letter. In addition, Aristotle, who in one passage speaks of 'Plato's unwritten opinions',¹ provides strong grounds for thinking that in their latest form Plato's views on metaphysics became increasingly mathematical, and developed considerably beyond anything found in the dialogues. There is a tradition also of a lecture on the good which its hearers found so mathematical as to be unintelligible.²

1. *Physics* 209B, 15.

2. Aristoxenus, *Harmonics* 30-31. Aristoxenus was a pupil of Aristotle, and says that Aristotle used to tell this story.

So much then for the advice I have to send you, and for the story of my first visit to Dionysius. As for my later journey overseas, anyone who is interested may learn from what follows how naturally and reasonably that came about. My first stay was spent as I described earlier, before formulating my advice to the friends and relatives of Dion. I used every means in my power to persuade Dionysius to let me go, and at last we came to an agreement. Dionysius undertook to send for Dion and me again when the war which was then going on in Sicily came to an end, and when he had put his rule on a more secure footing. In the meantime he asked Dion to regard his present position as a change of residence rather than exile, and on these terms I promised that I would return. When peace was restored Dionysius sent for me, but asked Dion to remain abroad for another year; he was, however, most anxious that I should come. Dion urged and begged me to go, because reports were constantly coming from Sicily that Dionysius was once more wonderfully enamoured of philosophy; for this reason Dion besought me most earnestly not to refuse the invitation. I knew that philosophy often has this sort of effect on young men; nevertheless I judged it safer for the moment to leave both Dion and Dionysius severely alone, and I made myself unpopular with both of them by answering that I was an old man and that what was now happening was totally incompatible with our previous agreement.

Next, it appears, Archytas¹ paid a visit to Dionysius; for before I left Sicily I had established ties of hospitality and friendship between Archytas and his school at Tarentum and Dionysius. There were others too at Syracuse who had received some instruction from Dion; and others again to whom they had in turn imparted it. Full of second-hand philosophical notions these people were apparently trying to converse with Dionysius about them as if he were thoroughly acquainted with all my views. Now Dionysius, besides having a certain aptitude for study, is wonderfully keen to excel; so

1. For Archytas of Tarentum, cf. p. 116, n. 1.

he was probably pleased to be addressed in this way and ashamed to let it become known that he had learnt nothing when I was at his court. The result was that he conceived a desire to get a clearer light on these matters and was at the same time driven on by a wish not to be outdone. The reason why he learnt nothing during my previous visit I have explained in what I have already written. So when I was safely home and, as I said just now, refused his second invitation, Dionysius, I suppose, felt passionately that his honour was involved in not having it thought that I had a poor opinion of his nature and character, and that after becoming acquainted with his way of living I was too disgusted to be still willing to visit him. 339

Now I am bound to tell the truth, and I must put up with it if anyone who hears what happened despises my philosophy and applauds the despot's intelligence. At his third attempt Dionysius sent a trireme for me to make my journey easier, and with it came Archedemus and some other Sicilian acquaintances of mine. He sent Archedemus, one of the disciples of Archytas, because he believed that I thought more highly of him than of anyone else in Sicily. All these brought me the same report, that Dionysius had made remarkable progress in philosophy. He also sent me a very long letter, knowing my affection for Dion and how eager Dion was that I should make the voyage and return to Syracuse. The letter was composed with an eye to all this, and its beginning ran more or less as follows. After the usual form of address and the conventional greeting, without any further preliminary it went on like this: 'If you now return to Sicily at my invitation, I assure you in the first place that Dion's affairs shall be settled to your satisfaction; I am sure that your wishes will be reasonable, and I will fall in with them. But if you refuse you will find that nothing which concerns Dion either personally or in any other way will turn out to your liking.' That is what the letter said; to repeat the rest of it would take too long and would not be to the point. Other letters too came to me from Archytas and the group at Tarentum, which spoke highly of

Dionysius' progress in philosophy, and added that if I did not come at once I should utterly undo the friendship which I had established between them and Dionysius, a friendship which was of no small importance to them politically. So when Dionysius' summons took this form, and I found that on one side I was being pulled by my friends in Sicily and Italy, while on the other those at Athens were positively pushing me out of the country with their importunity, I was confronted by the same argument as before, that I must not betray Dion and my friends and associates at Tarentum. In addition to this it occurred to me that there was nothing surprising in a young man of good natural ability, who had heard serious subjects talked of, conceiving a passionate desire for the best way of life. It was my duty therefore to make such inquiries as would settle the matter one way or the other; I must not shirk this duty and incur the reproach which would genuinely be mine if the reports that had come to me were really true.

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So, under cover of this reasoning, I set out, full of apprehension and expecting, as you may easily suppose, no very happy outcome. My journey, however, had at least this result that I discovered for myself the truth of the saying 'third time lucky', for I had the good fortune to come safe home again. For this after God I have to thank Dionysius, who frustrated the attempts of a number of people to destroy me, and showed in his dealings with me that he was not altogether devoid of shame.

When I arrived I made it my first task to discover whether Dionysius was genuinely on fire with enthusiasm for philosophy or whether the frequent reports to this effect which had come to Athens were baseless. There is a way of testing this which involves no loss of dignity and is quite suitable for absolute rulers, especially such as are full of second-hand ideas, which I perceived as soon as I arrived to be very much the case with Dionysius. The method is to demonstrate to such people the nature of the subject as a whole, and all the stages that must be gone through, and how much labour is

required. If the hearer has the divine spark which makes philosophy congenial to him and fits him for its pursuit, the way described to him appears so wonderful that he must follow it with all his might if life is to be worth living. So from that moment he puts pressure both on himself and on his guide, never letting him go until he either reaches his final goal or is able to make his own way for himself without the aid of his mentor. This is the state of mind in which such a man lives, discharging whatever business he may be engaged in, but holding fast throughout to philosophy and to the daily routine which will do most to foster his powers of learning and remembering and conducting sober debate within his own mind; for the opposite course he conceives a hatred which lasts till he dies.

But those who are not genuinely lovers of wisdom, in whom philosophy is no more than a superficial veneer like the tan men get by exposing themselves to the sun, once they see how much there is to learn and the labour involved and the disciplined way of life that the subject requires, decide that the task is too hard for them and beyond their scope. They are not in fact fit to practise philosophy, though some of them persuade themselves that they have a sufficient grasp of the whole matter and need give themselves no further trouble about it. This then is the clearest and safest test to apply to those who like soft living and are incapable of hard work; it has the advantage that a man has only himself to blame if he cannot meet the demands of the subject, and his guide is absolved from responsibility.

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It was with this in mind that I said what I did to Dionysius. I did not give him a complete exposition, nor did he ask me for one; he pretended that what he had heard from other people had already given him an adequate knowledge of many of the most important parts of the subject. I am told that since then he has written a book about what he learnt at that time, putting it together as if it were a treatise of his own, quite different from what I taught him; but of this I know nothing. I know that some others have also written on the

same topics, but such men are ignorant even of themselves.¹ But this much at any rate I can affirm about any present or future writers who pretend to knowledge of the matters with which I concern myself, whether they claim to have been taught by me or by a third party or to have discovered the truth for themselves; in my judgement it is impossible that they should have any understanding of the subject. No treatise by me concerning it exists or ever will exist. It is not something that can be put into words like other branches of learning; only after long partnership in a common life devoted to this very thing does truth flash upon the soul, like a flame kindled by a leaping spark, and once it is born there it nourishes itself thereafter. Yet this too I know, that if there were to be any oral or written teaching on this matter it would best come from me, and that it is I who would feel most deeply the harm caused by an inferior exposition. If I thought that any adequate spoken or written account could be given to the world at large, what more glorious life-work could I have undertaken than to put into writing what would be of great benefit to mankind and to bring the nature of reality to light for all to see? But I do not think that the attempt to put these matters into words would be to men's advantage, except to those few who can find out the truth for themselves with a little guidance; the rest would be filled either with an unjustifiable and quite improper contempt for their fellows or with a lofty and vain expectation, based on the belief that they were in possession of some mighty secret.

THE INADEQUACY OF WORDS TO EXPRESS
THE NATURE OF REALITY

The notoriously difficult metaphysical digression which follows has been much discussed. Some even of those who regard the rest of the letter as authentic have dismissed it as an irrelevant interpolation;

1. The meaning of the Greek is obscure. There may however be a reference to the importance of self-knowledge as a necessary basis for any advance in philosophy and to the Delphic maxim 'Know thyself'. cf. *Phaedrus* 229E (p. 25 above).

others have treated it not only as a necessary part of the writer's argument but as a passage of great importance for the understanding of Plato's thought. For a good brief exposition of its meaning cf. W. D. Ross, Plato's Theory of Ideas (Oxford, 1951), pp. 139-141. Ross holds that 'the passage indicates, more clearly perhaps than any other in Plato, his sense of the difficulties which attend the search for knowledge of the Ideas.'

Two points of particular interest may be noted. First, though the passage contains (342D) what Ross calls 'the most catholic list of types of idea to be found anywhere in Plato', neither of the two names which Plato uses elsewhere for the Forms (idea and eidos) is used at all. Second, at 342C knowledge (episteme), understanding (nous), and true opinion (doxa) are classed together, in contrast with the sharp distinction which Plato usually draws between the first two and the last. This point has been much stressed by opponents of the authenticity of the passage. It should, however, be observed that the writer adds that understanding has a nearer affinity to reality than the other two.

On this point I have it in mind to speak at greater length, 342 because it may be that my meaning will be clearer when I have done so. There is a true argument which stands in the way of anyone who dares to write anything whatever on such matters. It has often been used by me in the past, but it needs to be stated again on this occasion.

For everything that exists we may distinguish three instruments by which knowledge of it must be acquired; knowledge itself is a fourth member of the group, and the actual entity which is the object of knowledge and truly exists must be regarded as a fifth. There is then, first, the name, second, the definition, third, the representation, and fourth, knowledge.¹ Take² a single example if you wish to understand my

1. At *Laws* 895D three things are said to be involved in knowing any object: the object itself, its definition, and its name. The reality there discussed is soul, and mention of a 'representation' would not be appropriate, as it is here where the example chosen is the circle, which can be represented by a diagram.

2. The use of the imperative singular in this sentence has been taken to suggest that the writer is incorporating matter used in another context.

meaning, and then apply that understanding universally. There is an object called 'circle'. Its name is the word that I have just uttered. Next comes its definition, compounded of nouns and verbs; for the object named 'round' and 'circumference' and 'circle' the definition would be 'the thing whose extremities in every direction are equidistant from its centre'. Third, there is the representation, which can be drawn and rubbed out or turned on a lathe and later destroyed; none of these things can happen to the real circle, to which all these three refer, because it is something quite different from them. Fourth, there is knowledge and understanding and true belief about these things; these must be classed together, because they reside not in sounds or in physical shapes but in souls; clearly then they must be distinguished both from the real circle itself and from the three instruments first mentioned. Of these understanding comes closest to the fifth in kinship and likeness and the others are more distant.

343 The same holds good of straight as of curved shapes and surfaces, of goodness, beauty and justice, of all physical bodies natural or artificial, of fire, water and the other elements, of all living beings and moral qualities, and of all the things that men do or have done to them; in every case, unless a man somehow grasps the first four, he will never attain perfect knowledge of the fifth. Moreover, owing to the inadequacy of language, these four are as much concerned to demonstrate what any particular thing is like as to reveal its essential being; that is why no intelligent man will ever dare to commit his thoughts to words, still less to words that cannot be changed, as is the case with what is expressed in written characters.¹

What has just been said, however, requires further explanation. Every circle that is drawn or turned on a lathe is full in practice of the opposite of the reality to which we have assigned the fifth place. At every point it is in contact with the straight, whereas the circle itself, I maintain, has in it no

1. cf. *Phaedrus* 275D.

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element, small or great, of the nature which is its opposite.¹ Besides, none of these things has a name that we can regard as fixed. There is nothing to stop the things which are at present called 'round' being called 'straight' and vice versa, and their stability would be in no way impaired if one made this transposition and called them by the opposite names. The same is true of the definition; being compounded of nouns and verbs it is in consequence far from being adequately stable. One might employ innumerable arguments to demonstrate the inaccuracy of each of the four, but the most powerful is this. There are, as I said just now, two things which must be distinguished; what a thing is like and its essential being. Now the soul is searching for knowledge of essential being, but what each of the four offers it, whether in words or in actual practice, is not what it is searching for, but something which, whether it is expressed in words or displayed in visible form, can be easily refuted by the evidence of the senses; the result is to create perplexity and obscurity in practically every man's mind. When we are dealing with matters on which, owing to our bad training, we are not in the habit of searching for the truth, but are satisfied to accept what is offered to us as representations of it, we do not make ourselves mutually ridiculous when we ask and answer questions based on an ability to manipulate and criticize the four instruments; but when it is a matter of requiring a clear demonstration of the essential being which occupies the fifth place, anyone who has mastered the art of refutation gains the day, and makes the expositor of a doctrine, whether he is speaking or writing or answering questions, appear in the eyes of his audience totally ignorant of the subject on which he is attempting to write or speak. It may sometimes happen that the audience is unaware that it is not the soul of the writer or speaker which is at fault, but the four instruments

1. The meaning is that any tangent drawn to a circle physically described will coincide with it for a certain distance. No concrete representation of a circle is absolutely circular.

that I have enumerated, each of which is by its very nature defective.

It is only by the constant use of all four instruments, moving up and down from one to another, that knowledge of what is in its nature good can be engendered – and that with difficulty – in a soul which is itself naturally good. Where the soul is ill-endowed, as most souls are both intellectually and
 344 morally – in some cases too a good endowment has been spoilt – Lynceus himself could not make a man see.¹ To put it in a word, neither facility in learning nor a good memory can make a man see if his nature is not akin to the object; such knowledge simply cannot come to birth in constitutions which are alien to it. Those then who have no natural affinity or kinship with justice and other forms of excellence, however quick and retentive they may be in other matters, and those in whom a natural affinity is accompanied by slowness of apprehension and forgetfulness, can none of them acquire such knowledge as is attainable about virtue and vice.² I add vice, because both of them must be learnt together, and this requires great expense of time and trouble, as I began by saying. It is only when all these things, names and definitions, visual and other sensations, are rubbed together and subjected to tests in which questions and answers are exchanged in good faith and without malice that finally, when human capacity is stretched to its limit, a spark of understanding and intelligence flashes out and illuminates the subject at issue.³ That is why any serious student of serious realities will shrink from making truth the helpless object of men's ill-will by committing it to writing. In a word, the conclusion to be drawn is this; when one sees a written composition, whether it be on law by a legislator or on any other subject, one can be sure, if the

1. Lynceus, one of the Argonauts, was proverbially keen-sighted.

2. For the natural gifts needed by the philosopher cf. *Republic* 484ff, especially 486D.

3. The same image of friction producing a spark is used in *Republic* 435A where conclusions about justice in the state and justice in the individual are to be 'rubbed together' to produce a spark which will illuminate the real nature of justice.

writer is a serious man, that his book does not represent his most serious thoughts; they remain stored up in the noblest region of his personality. If he is really serious in what he has set down in writing 'then surely' not the gods but men 'have robbed him of his wits'.¹

Anyone who has followed the account given in this digression will see clearly that if Dionysius or another, small or great, has written anything on the first and highest principles of nature, he cannot to my way of thinking have had any sound knowledge of the subject on which he writes; if he had he would feel the same reverence for truth as I, and would not have dared to expose it to discredit in a world with which it is out of tune. It cannot be that he has written to assist his memory; there is no danger of a man forgetting the truth, once his soul has grasped it, since it lies within a very small compass. No, if he in fact has written at all, it must have been to gratify a base ambition, either by pretending that these thoughts were his own or else by appearing to share a culture of which he was not worthy, since his reason for pursuing it was simply the reputation that would result from its acquisition. If Dionysius acquired this understanding from a single conversation with me, so be it; but how he could have done so Gude kens, as the Theban says,² for I went through the matter with him in the way I have described once only; never again. Anyone who is anxious to know about what followed must consider why it was that we did not repeat the lesson a second and third time, or even oftener. Did Dionysius after that single session suppose that he knew enough and did he in fact know enough, either because he had found things out for himself or because he had learnt them earlier from others? Or did he think that what I told him was of no importance? Or, a third possibility, did he realize that my teaching was beyond his capacity, and that he would never be able to live a life devoted to wisdom and virtue? If he thought what I have to say

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1. A quotation from Homer, *Iliad*, 7.460.

2. cf. *Phaedo* 62A, where the same dialect phrase is used by Cebes, a Theban.

trivial, he will have to encounter testimony to the opposite effect from many who are probably much weightier judges of such a matter than he is. If, on the other hand, he believed that he had discovered or learnt already something which is nevertheless valuable for the education of a free spirit, how, unless he is a most extraordinary person, could he so recklessly have brought dishonour upon the man who is the guide and authority in this matter? That, however, is exactly what he did, as I will now tell you.

PLATO'S LAST DEALINGS WITH DIONYSIUS AND HIS DEPARTURE FROM SYRACUSE

The letter returns to straightforward narrative which requires little comment. It is to be noted, however, that the account given here differs in some points from that given by Plutarch in his life of Dion, in spite of the fact that Plutarch unquestionably regarded the letter as authentic. In speaking of Plato's departure Plutarch explicitly says that his account does not entirely tally with 'Plato's own words', but it is clear that he retains the alternative version in order not to sacrifice a good story. 'You will, no doubt,' he makes Dionysius say to Plato, 'speak very ill of me to your fellow-philosophers.' 'I hope we shall never be so short of matter in the Academy,' replied Plato with a smile, 'as to need to mention you'.

Not long after the events already described Dionysius, who hitherto had allowed Dion to retain his property and enjoy the income from it, forbade Dion's agents to send remittances to the Peloponnese, in apparent utter forgetfulness of what he had said in his letter. He declared that Dion's estate belonged now no longer to Dion but to Dion's son, who was his own nephew and therefore his legal ward. This was the position of affairs at the point that we have reached. When this happened I saw clearly what Dionysius' enthusiasm for philosophy amounted to, and I had good ground for indignation, whether I liked it or not. It was now summer and the sailing season; so I decided that, though I had no more reason to be angry with

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Dionysius than with myself and with those who constrained me to come for the third time to the Strait of Scylla, 'once more to retrace my course to the dangers of deadly Charybdis',¹ I ought to tell Dionysius that in view of his shameful treatment of Dion I could stay with him no longer. Dionysius tried to pacify me and begged me to stay, thinking that it would not be well for him that I should depart in a hurry bearing such news in person, but when he could not prevail on me he promised that he would himself arrange transport for me. My intention was to embark on the first ship to set sail, so angry was I, and I was prepared to face anything that might happen to me if I were prevented, since it was perfectly clear that I was the innocent and injured party. But when Dionysius saw that I had not the smallest desire to stay he hit upon the following way of keeping me there for that sailing season. He came next day and put to me this plausible proposal: 'Let us rid ourselves of the disagreements in which Dion and his affairs are always involving us. For your sake this is what I will do for Dion. I am willing to let him receive his property and live in the Peloponnese, not as an exile but with the possibility of returning to Syracuse, when he and I and you who are his friends agree that he should do so. My only condition is that he should not conspire against me; for this you and your friends and Dion's friends here must go bail, and you in turn must get security from him. Whatever funds he receives shall be deposited in the Peloponnese or at Athens with trustees of your choosing; Dion shall enjoy the income, but is not to withdraw the capital without your consent. I do not feel sure that Dion would do the right thing by me if he had his considerable fortune at his disposal, but I have more confidence in you and your friends. See if you find this proposal satisfactory; if you do, stay for this year, and then depart for good taking Dion's property with you. I am sure that Dion will be very grateful to you if you arrange things for him on these terms.'

1. Homer, *Odyssey* 12, 428. These words are quoted as from Plato by Plutarch, *Dion* 18.

I was vexed by this proposal, but I said that I would think about it and give him my decision on the following day. That was what we agreed. When I was alone I debated the matter with myself in great perplexity, but the thought which came uppermost in my mind was this. 'It may be that Dionysius has no intention of keeping any of his promises, but suppose that after my departure he writes a plausible letter to Dion, and gets a number of Dion's friends to do the same, detailing the proposal he has just made to me, and saying that in spite of his offer I refused to play any part in what he suggested and showed myself completely indifferent to Dion's interests. Suppose too that he does not want to let me go, and without giving any actual order lets it be known among the ships' captains, as he easily could, that he is averse from my sailing; would any of them be prepared in those circumstances to take me on board, setting out, as I should have to do, from the house of Dionysius?' (I should say that, to add to my difficulties, I was then living in the palace garden, from which the porter too would have refused to let me out without an express order to that effect from Dionysius.) 'If I stay for this year I shall be able to let Dion know my situation and what I am doing, and if Dionysius keeps his word I shall have achieved something by no means derisory, for at a proper valuation Dion's fortune is probably not less than a hundred talents. If on the other hand the situation develops in the way that seems likely I do not see what I am to do. Nevertheless it would appear that I must stick things out for another year, and put Dionysius' intentions to the test of actual experience.'

Having come to this conclusion I told Dionysius the following day that I had decided to stay. 'But', I added, 'you must not regard me as empowered to act for Dion. We must send him a joint letter embodying the present proposition, and ask if he is satisfied with it. If he is not and wishes to put forward any alternative he should write at once, and you must promise not to take any further action about him in the mean time.' That was what I said, and that was what we agreed in almost these very terms. So the ships sailed, and then, when it was no

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longer possible for me to go, Dionysius remarked to me that only half the property should go to Dion and the other half to his son. The whole was to be sold, and I should have half the proceeds to take for Dion, while the other half was left in Sicily for his son; that was the fairest thing to do. I was stunned by this remark, and it seemed absurd to say anything more; however, I said that we must wait for Dion's letter and then send him this further proposal. Immediately after this Dionysius in the most wanton way sold the whole of Dion's property, on his own terms and to purchasers of his own choice, without saying a word to me about it. And I for my part refrained from saying anything further to him about Dion's affairs, for I thought that nothing was to be gained by reopening the matter.

This is the story so far of my attempt to come to the aid of philosophy and of my friends, but from that time onward the terms on which Dionysius and I lived were these. I was like a bird looking out from its cage and longing to fly away, while Dionysius was seeking for a way of keeping Dion's property by scaring me off the subject. Nevertheless, before Sicily at large we maintained a façade of friendship.

Now Dionysius, contrary to his father's policy, attempted to reduce the pay of his older mercenaries. The troops gathered in an angry mob and refused to acquiesce. Dionysius, in an attempt to compel them, shut the gates of the citadel; whereupon they charged straight at the walls, shouting a war-cry in their own barbaric tongue. At this Dionysius took fright and granted to the assembled soldiery all they demanded and more.

A rumour soon spread that Heracleides¹ was at the bottom of this trouble, and when it reached him he went into hiding. Dionysius, thwarted in his efforts to arrest him, summoned

1. Heracleides held a military command under Dionysius. After his escape he joined Dion in Greece, and returned to Sicily in command of a fleet shortly after Dion's capture of Syracuse. For the story of his subsequent intrigues against Dion, which led ultimately to his own and Dion's death, the chief authority is Plutarch in his life of Dion. Theodotes was the uncle of Heracleides.

Theodotes to his garden, where I also happened to be walking at that time. What other talk passed between them I do not know, for I did not hear it, but I remember distinctly what Theodotes said to Dionysius in my presence. 'Plato,' he said, 'I am trying to persuade our friend Dionysius that if I succeed in bringing Heracleides into his presence to answer what he is now charged with, and if Dionysius decides that Heracleides should no longer dwell in Sicily, he should be allowed to take his wife and son and to live in the Peloponnese, enjoying the income of his property, provided that he does Dionysius no harm. I have already sent for him once and I will send again; it may be that he will respond to one or other of these messages. But I beg and beseech Dionysius that, wherever Heracleides is found, either here or in the country, no penalty shall be inflicted on him beyond banishment abroad during Dionysius' pleasure. Do you agree to that?' he said, turning to Dionysius. 'Yes, I agree,' replied Dionysius; 'even if he is found in your house nothing shall happen to him beyond what you have said.' The following evening Theodotes and Eurybius came running to me in a state of great perturbation. 'Plato,' said Theodotes, 'you were there yesterday when Dionysius made a compact with us both about Heracleides?' 'Indeed I was,' I answered. 'Well now,' he went on, 'troops are scouring the country in pursuit of Heracleides, and it may well be that he is somewhere in this neighbourhood.

349 Come with us to Dionysius without losing a moment.' So we set off and when we got into Dionysius' presence the two of them stood weeping silently, while I said: 'Our friends are afraid that you may be taking some step about Heracleides contrary to yesterday's agreement, for I believe that he has returned and has been seen about here.' At this Dionysius flared up and went all colours, like a man in a rage. Theodotes fell at his feet and, grasping his hand, begged him with tears not to do such a thing, while I by way of comforting him said: 'Take heart, Theodotes; Dionysius will never dare to violate the agreement we made yesterday.' 'I made no agreement of any kind whatever with *you*,' said Dionysius, giving me a very

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despotic look. 'God knows you did,' said I; 'you promised to refrain from the very course which Theodotes is begging you not to take.' With these words I turned away and left him. After this he continued to hunt for Heracleides, but Theodotes got a message to him urging him to take refuge in flight. Dionysius sent out Tisias and a detachment with orders to pursue him, but Heracleides succeeded in reaching Carthaginian territory a few hours ahead of them.

After this Dionysius concluded that the old plot might furnish a decent pretext for hostile relations with me, so that he need not part with Dion's property. His first step was to remove me from the citadel, on the ground that the garden in which I was then living was needed for a female religious festival which would last ten days; his orders were that I should lodge outside with Archedemus for this period. While I was there Theodotes sent for me and poured out a long and indignant string of complaints about Dionysius' behaviour. Dionysius, hearing that I had visited Theodotes, and using this as a further ground for quarrelling with me, akin to the former, sent to ask me if my visits had taken place at Theodotes' invitation. 'Certainly,' I answered. 'In that case,' said the messenger, 'I was to tell you that you are behaving ill in always preferring Dion and Dion's friends to Dionysius.' That was the message, and after that he never summoned me back to the palace, but took it as established that I was the friend of Theodotes and Heracleides and therefore his enemy; besides, he did not believe in my good-will on account of the utter ruin of Dion's property. So from that time I lived outside the citadel among the mercenaries.

Various people now visited me, among them some members of ships' crews who hailed from Athens and were my fellow-countrymen; they reported to me that I had a bad name among the light infantry, who were threatening to kill me if they could lay hands on me. To provide for my safety I sent a message to Archytas and my other friends at Tarentum telling them my situation. They found some pretext for a diplomatic mission from their city and sent Lamiscus, one of their own

number, with a thirty-oared vessel. On his arrival he made representations to Dionysius on my behalf, telling him that I was anxious to depart, and begging him not to stand in my way. So Dionysius gave way and sent me off with money for my journey, but as for Dion's property I neither asked for nor received any part of it whatever.

When I reached Olympia in the Peloponnese I found Dion attending the festival and told him what had happened. He swore that he would have satisfaction, and called upon me and my relations and friends to prepare to punish Dionysius for the wrongs he had done, in my case by failure to discharge his obligations as my host – that was what Dion thought and said – and in Dion's by an unjust sentence of banishment and exile. When I heard this I told him that he was welcome to call upon my friends, if they would listen to him. 'But for my part,' I said, 'you and the others in a way compelled me to share Dionysius' hearth and table and to take part with him in the rites of religion. He probably believed the allegations of all those who told him that I was conspiring with you against him and his authority; yet for all that his conscience restrained him from putting me to death. So, leaving aside the fact that I am almost past the age to help anyone in war, I am impartially at the service of you both if ever you wish to be friends and to benefit one another, but as long as you are set on doing harm you must look elsewhere.' This I said in disgust at my Sicilian 'adventures' and their unhappy outcome. But they would not listen to me or entertain my suggestions of conciliation, and are therefore responsible for all the harm that has come upon them. If Dionysius had restored Dion's property or had been completely reconciled with him, in all human probability none of this would have happened – I could easily have restrained Dion, for I had both the desire and the power to do so; but as things are they have attacked one another and brought about universal ruin.

351 Yet Dion's policy was what I should say that mine or any reasonable man's should be; as far as his own power and his friends and his country are concerned such a man will aim to

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attain supreme authority and honour simply by performing the greatest public service. I do not call it public service when a poor man, who is unable to control his passions or resist the temptations of pleasure, in order to enrich himself and his party and his city collects a gang of conspirators, and then, when he has put the wealthy to death as public enemies, dissipates their property and encourages his accomplices and followers to do the same, in order that none of them may say that it is *his* fault that they are poor. Nor do I mean honour acquired by services which consist in carrying laws to distribute the property of the few among the many or, if the state of which a man is head is powerful and the mistress of many smaller states, wrongfully appropriating the possessions of those smaller states for his own state. Neither Dion nor any other man would by deliberate choice set out to acquire in this way a power which would be a curse for ever to himself and his family; his aim will be the political and legal system that is fairest and best, and that does not involve sentences of death or exile in the smallest degree. This was the ideal that Dion pursued, believing that it is better to be the victim of wickedness than to be its author; but, though he took precautions to protect himself, he tripped nevertheless at the very moment when his triumph over his enemies was complete. We need feel no surprise at this. In dealing with the wicked a good man of sense and discretion is not likely to be wholly at fault about their nature; yet he may very well suffer the fate of a good seaman, who knows well enough that a storm is coming, but may be taken unawares by its sudden and exceptional violence, and in consequence overwhelmed. This was what undid Dion. He knew that those who brought about his destruction were thoroughly bad men; what he did not realize was the depth of their ignorance and wickedness and greed. To this he fell a victim, and brought upon Sicily infinite grief.

The advice I have to give in the situation that has arisen since his death has mostly been given already; so let that suffice. I have gone back over the story of my second visit to Sicily because it seemed to me that the strange and improbable

nature of the events made such an account necessary. If anyone finds that what I have said makes those events more intelligible, and understands that in the circumstances I have described there were sufficient reasons for what happened, this account will have accomplished adequately what it set out to do.